

Written for the Lady's Book.

SELF-EDUCATING TEACHERS.

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In our great extent of territory, where so many teachers are required, it is necessary that some should be employed, who have not only been the sole architects of their own education, but are also painfully sensible of its incompleteness. It has been sometimes asserted that those alone, who have enjoyed high intellectual advantages, should aspire to the honour of instructing others. Filled as we are, with respect for the possessors of profound learning, and with pity, bordering on contempt, for the smatterers, who, assuming to be oracles, "understand neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm," it is impossible to look without deep interest, on that large class of industrious teachers, who gather around them the children of the peaceful villages, and secluded districts of our land. There is fraud in pretending to be an adept in sciences of which we are ignorant, a fraud which the more discriminating members of a school are quick to discover and prompt to reveal.

Still, there is no reason why a teacher may not pursue, as a sort of companion with her pupils, some study which she may not have had opportunity previously to acquire. She must, indeed, keep in advance, and by more thorough research, be able, in a great measure, to obviate their difficulties, or satisfy their inquiries. She must put herself at their head, like the lawgiver of the chosen people, who was in all respects their leader, though the region they explored was new to both.

Yet, this liberty of supplying the defects of education, after the important office of a teacher is assumed, by no means applies to the rudiments of knowledge. These should be thoroughly committed, and combined with tact in imparting them, by every one who is ambitious of becoming a guide to the young mind. No female should be placed at the head of any school, however small in number, or obscure in

locality, who is not well qualified to instruct in reading, orthography, writing, common needlework, and arithmetic. These attainments, however humble in the eye of many, are the substratum of all correct education, and much time and attention should be devoted to them. The teacher who thoroughly imparts these to the pupils under her care, and at the same time earnestly employs her intervals of leisure in acquiring higher branches of knowledge, performs a good work, both for others and for herself. Advancing in a sort of companionship with those entrusted to her charge, will not her sympathy with them be more entire?—her appreciation of the obstacles which they must encounter, more clear and correct?—her forbearance more deep-seated and enduring?

But, the whole of education is not the requisition of lessons, or the hearing of recitations. Moral training, the implantation of right opinions, principles and habits, are now conceded to be among its most important objects. For this part of her vocation, it is possible that the self-educating teacher may have derived some positive advantages. Let us inquire how those restricted circumstances, which obstruct the acquisition of the higher studies and accomplishments, may yet have a favourable influence on the formation of character.

Turn to the common scenery of life. Enter the school-room. Why does that boy deface his books, or waste his pens and pencils? Why are his volumes alternately his sport and his footstool? Is it not because he knows that his parents are able to purchase more? Why does he wander over their pages with a desultory glance, or the scowl of discontent? Have the luxuries of wealth enervated his mind, and made him count application a drudgery? Why does the boy at his side use with such economy his scanty

writing materials, and so carefully return his books to their place, when his task is finished? Perhaps he has been taught their value, by the difficulty of obtaining them. Why does he pursue his studies with unremitting zeal, and a cheerful countenance? Because he considers it a privilege to be permitted to acquire knowledge, and his studies are but a recreation from severer labours. His mind finds sweetness in the aliment that gives it strength, while his companion, like a prisoner, is anxious only to escape from durance. One, in toiling for knowledge, feels himself the indebted party; the other, if he applies his mind, imagines that he has conferred a favour on parent or teacher, which entitles him to commendation or reward. This diversity of motive necessarily produces diversity in trains of thought, habits of mind, and results of action. Who will have the advantage? If industry and application are of immense value throughout life, can that state of fortune be accounted an unmixed evil, which aids their implantation by the strong hand of necessity?

The mother, in humble life, all whose energies are in action for the comfort of her family, tells her daughter that when she has discharged her part of the necessary work that devolves upon her, she shall have time to study her lesson. Does not the diligence which she puts forth in her household labour, give zest to the interval, which she thus earns for her book? Has it not a tendency to assist her in the great science of the valuation of time? which we sometimes neglect to learn, until time is ours no longer, and we depart to return no more. Do not the obedience and patience thus called into exercise, aid the growth of that self-control, without which no person has a right to undertake the instruction of others? Is not the daughter of aristocracy, whose attention is so divided between a multitude of studies and accomplishments that she is almost of necessity superficial, or desultory, more in danger of irritability, ennui, or nervous disorganization, those formidable foes to the success and well being of teachers?

Why is yonder student at the University, lounging in the fashionable walks, displaying an expensive costume, or contracting unnecessary debts? Why is he late at prayers, listless at recitations, satisfied only in the resorts of folly, vanity, or dissipation? Why does he return home, in love with indolence, tinctured with extravagance, or involved in debt? Was it because he felt that his parents were rich, and believed wealth to be a substitute both for science, and virtue? Why does a youth from the same neighbourhood, perhaps, his inferior in talents, maintain the first standing in his class, and win the highest honours of the institution? What quickens his love of knowledge, brightens his brow with intelligence, and incites him to mark every hour with diligence, every day with duty? What enables him to bear privation with a noble hardness of soul, to "scorn delights, and live laborious days?" Is it not the consciousness that by his own exertions, he must stand or fall? Thus excited to perseverance, he ascertains the extent of his own powers, brightens them by exercise, and entrusts them "to the usurer," that the Giver at his coming, may receive his own: while the indolent mind, weakened by indulgence, views knowledge as an "austere man," and committing its talent to the earth, finds its harvest to be the mildew and decay of its own powers.

Where a taste for high literature exists, and the

means of attaining it are not wholly precluded, mediocrity of fortune, has been often found favourable to its acquisition. Would Johnson have attained his proud eminence in the realm of mind, without the prompting of necessity? Did he not express fervent gratitude, that the shaft of adversity had been appointed to rouse him from the slumbers of indolence? Is it probable that mankind would have been delighted with the eloquence of his "Prince of Abyssinia," if affluence had enabled him to discharge the mournful debt of his mother's obsequies? Did not the classic Beattie trace his ardour in literary pursuit, and his premature proficiency, back to the stimulus of his bursary at Aberdeen? and refer some of the most exquisite stanzas in his "Minstrel," to that period of seclusion and poverty, when he toiled as a village school-master and precentor, at the foot of the Grampian Mountains? Would the Ayrshire ploughman's "wild bird of heaven," have displayed such changeful plumage, or attained such fitful, and fearless compass of tone, had it been caged, and pampered with luxury?

May we not affirm that mediocrity of fortune, is favourable to virtue? Do not habits of self-denial, and self-control lead to moderated desires, and foster that contentment which is the secret of happiness? A well regulated mind, by accustoming itself to privation and sacrifice, is aided lightly to esteem selfish gratifications, and to cultivate those disinterested affections, which are among the elements of piety. Will not he, whose narrow possessions are the fruit of his own industry, be qualified to understand their intrinsic value, and inclined to avoid the vices by which they are scattered to the winds? It would seem as if he might skilfully graduate his expenses to his income, and studiously keep his spirit unhumiliated by the embarrassments of debt, and unchilled by dread at the face of a creditor. Rational economy, while it supplies the means of rendering every man his due, is the basis of true charity. Profuse expenditure is no friend to compassion, and how can he have a right to be liberal, whose undischarged debts are rankling in his conscience? Is not the sweet, inward voice of charity, overpowered by the "cry of the labourers whose wages are kept back?" while he whose industry has satisfied the claims of justice, may make glad the hearts of others, while his own reproaches him not.

What so effectually teaches sympathy for our fellow creatures as having borne some share in the evils that they endure? Who with a warmer overflowing of heart, would impart bread to the hungry, or a garment to the shivering poor, than the man who had at some period of his life, felt their need, or learned their value, by the labour of acquiring them? The old song says feelingly,

"Tis the poor man alone,
When he hears the poor moan,
Of his morsel, a morsel will give."

In such gifts, however humble, there is more true charity than in the costly donations of pride, listening to hear itself applauded. Not the gifts which the rich man cast into the treasury, but the two mites of the self-denying, won the favouring notice of those pure eyes that read the heart. The spirit which has well endured trial and privation, must have a peculiar class of sympathies, with which those who have been enervated by luxury, intermeddle not; as the ancient

Israelites were incited to pity the stranger, by the keen remembrance of their own sorrows, in the house of bondage. If the happiness of any condition be computed by its tendencies to promote usefulness, by the energies which it awakens, the virtues and sympathies which it is adapted to cherish; many, who have been inclined to consider restricted circumstances as an evil, will doubtless, in making up the account of life, bless that Almighty Disposer, who shielded them from the temptations, and enervating influences of wealth. "We bring not innocence into the world with us," said the great Milton, "but rather impurity; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by that, which is contrary."

Since the discipline of overcoming obstacles; arms the mind with energy and the soul with patience, it would seem an admirable preparation for those who are to instruct the young. The perseverance which they have themselves exercised, they will be apt to teach. That sense of the value of time, which has been forced upon them by adverse circumstances, will more urgently excite those under their care, to gather up its golden fragments, and save even the dust, which it scatters from its swift pinions on their resistless rush to eternity.

We, of course, make a distinction between *self-educating* and *self-educated* teachers; for the first does not necessarily imply the last, nor the last the first. For the *self-educating*, these remarks are principally intended; for those, who by regular study, make advances in knowledge, for the sake of others,

and in some measure, in their company. These keep alive within themselves, that habit of constant improvement, which the maxims of philosophers have so long toiled to impress upon the young. "He is the most perfect man," says the learned Bacon, "who is the most susceptible of help, improvement, impression, alteration." Self-educating teachers are a living example to their pupils, of the unrelenting progression which they require of them. They have no opportunity to settle upon their lees. The stagnation of purpose, which sometimes steals over those, who have been flattered for greater attainments, is unknown to them. Their intellect constantly awake to ascend the tree of knowledge scatters more diligently of its fruits to those who stand beneath. Probably, its own exertions preserve in it a freshness and vigour, which may enkindle them to new activity.

"Constant rotation of the unwearied wheel
That Nature rides upon, maintains her health,
Her beauty, her fertility."

Perhaps some analogy to this happy result may be traced in the mind, whose consciousness of the boundless regions of knowledge yet untravelled, prompts to unrelenting effort, and to profound humility. And may the large class of self-educating teachers, who bear as their motto—"not as though we had already attained, either were already perfect,"—be cheered by the smile of the country, to whom their faithful labours are so invaluable.